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Chapter 8

Two communities, one family

Experiences of young Deaf LGBT+ people living in a minority within a minority

Paul Michaels and Abigail Gorman

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the young Deaf[1] LGBT+ community. We draw parallels to Third Culture Kids who are raised in a culture other than their parents which is often the case for Deaf children and almost entirely the case with young Deaf LGBT+ people. This community has a shared experience of growing up Deaf and LGBT+ which means that very often, meeting new people requires a degree of trust. Once that trust is built, there is strong support and acceptance from within the community. Certain cultural markers are examined within this chapter; these cultural markers identify a person as being involved with the Deaf LGBT+ community, including a sense of community, Gay Sign Variation, supporting other members of the community when access to information in a signed language is limited, keeping in touch, meeting up and acceptance of difference. We also look at the impact of how a lack of discussion around gender identity and sexual orientation can affect the identity of the young Deaf LGBT+ people and how their lives may have been different if discussions were conducted earlier on their life.

Methodology

The data for this chapter was collected from two sources. The first was from participants involved in the Master's Degree by Research carried out by Paul

Michaels in 2015 and the second from respondents to a call for research participants posted on the Deaf LGBTQ+ UK page on Facebook (available at www. facebook.com/groups/1644603052253227) on 7 December 2018.

The 2015 group included five people aged 18 to 35 taken from a total of 15 people interviewed at that time. The other ten people were not included in this data analysis because they were aged 36+ and outside of the focus of the chapter. All five interviewed were self-identifying as gay men and all lived in the UK. They were known to Paul socially or through his work as a sign language interpreter, therefore, the research was conducted using non-random sampling.

The interviews took place between 27 January 2012 and 26 February 2013 and there were two methods in which data were collected. The first method was through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, and the second method was a written questionnaire that was emailed to research participants and later returned by them. There was a mix of questions, with a majority of them being open questions of an attitudinal style and a small number of closed questions. All inter- views, apart from the one completed on the paper questionnaire, were video recorded on a handheld digital video recorder and later, to maintain the anonymity of the research participants, were fully translated from British Sign Language into spoken English by Paul and saved as an audio file. Express Scribe transcription software was used because of specific functionalities that make it easy to alter the speed of the playback of the audio file loaded. This feature enabled the audio file to be played slowly at a constant pitch in order to enable simultaneous typing of what was being heard, thereby creating a transcription of the original interview.

The 2018 group totalled 16 people aged between 18 and 30 who responded to a post by Abigail on Facebook in a group called Deaf LGBTQ+ and her Instagram account to attract international participants, requesting that people respond to six different questions by recording a short video of a maximum of one minute per response and send that in a private message to Abigail. She

subsequently translated the video clip directly from international sign language into written English. Responses came from people from Belgium (one person), Denmark (one person), UK (eight people), Estonia (one person), Ireland (one person), Sweden (two people) and New Zealand (two people).

The following tables present a breakdown of the research participants by name given by the authors (to protect identity), self-identifying sexual identity, country of residence and the year they provided the data (Table 8.1), and an explanation of their self-identifying sexual orientation or gender identity categories (Table 8.2).

Table 8.1 Research participants

Name	*Identity*	*Country*	*Year*
Emma	LW	UK	2018
Olivia	LW	Sweden	2018
Isabella	MTFP	UK	2018
Liam	BM	New Zealand	2018
Sophia	MTFP	UK	2018
Charlotte	LW	UK	2018
Noah	PM	UK	2018
Will	FTMP	Denmark	2018
Mia	BW/PW	New Zealand	2018
Rob	GM	Belgium	2018
Logan	GM	UK	2018
Mason	GM	UK	2018
Oliver	GM	UK	2018
Amelia	QW	Estonia	2018
Jacob	GM	Ireland	2018
Lucas	GM	Sweden	2018
Michael	GM	UK	2015
Alex	GM	UK	2015
Ethan	GM	UK	2015
Aiden	GM	UK	2015
Joseph	GM	UK	2015

Table 8.2 Key to self-identifying sexual orientation or gender identity categories

BM	Bisexual Male
BW	Bisexual Woman
FTMP	Female to Male Person
GM	Gay Male
LW	Lesbian Woman
MTFP	Male to Female Person
PM	Pansexual Male
PW	Pansexual Woman
QW	Queer Woman

The Deaf community

When Mindess (2006: 79) talks about the Deaf community, she explains that 'every culture is made up of individuals, and within each culture there exist variations shaped by the background and personality of its members'. That is most certainly the case with the sub-group of the Deaf community which is known as the Deaf LGBT+ community. The ideology of variation can be exciting and provide us with a rich community, but the reality of growing up and being involved in a collectivist society, which the Deaf community is often described as (Mindess, 2006), can be daunting at times.

When a new-born is first diagnosed as Deaf, this can come as a shock to the parent, mostly due to the lack of information about deafness and the general perception about what Deaf people are able (and more commonly not able) to do. As a result of this, most parents want their children to be 'normal' and fit in with all the other children at the nursery or school. As most Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell and Karchmer, 2004), and based on information given to them by their first point of contact, usually medical practitioners, very early on in the child's life, the parents will want to begin to normalise their child. This usually involves giving them hearing aids or cochlear implants and wishing to send them to mainstream schools when they become

of age. More often than not, the information given to them by the doctors will be from a medical point of view and not a cultural one. Such a view in general does not recommend assimilation of the Deaf community, and this often leads to isolation, loneliness, invisibility and oppression.

As Stone and Stirling (1994) explain:

> The deaf children of hearing parents often live exclusively in the 'hearing' culture and have minimal contact with deaf role models, a situation that may lead to more identity confusion and less acceptance among members of this group. (1994: 49)

They go on to explain that from the 43 students (aged 7–15) they interviewed from an elementary school in Washington, DC, most of the children with Deaf parents accepted their deafness while many of those with hearing parents hoped or expected their Deaf identities to change in adulthood to 'become more similar to the hearing members of their families' (Stone and Stirling, 1994: 51–52). This goes to show the different experiences of Deaf children growing up in familial households different to themselves.

Deaf and LGBT+ within the Deaf community

Like Deaf people, members of the LGBT+ community will also often grow up in familial cultures different to themselves, resulting in a coming-out process at some point in their life. Therefore, for Deaf LGBT+ people there is usually a double 'coming-out' process: one as a Deaf person early on in life and one as LGBT+ person later on. For some, this can be a stressful experience, depending on what kind of attitudes other people have. However, a second coming out for a Deaf person as LGBT+ may be less traumatic for Deaf LGBT+ people because fortunately, many Deaf young people are protected from homophobic verbal abuse because of their deafness – this is not to say that they don't experience it, but they may not have to endure the same level of abuse that their hearing peers would be subjected to in public.

It is difficult to quantify the number of Deaf LGBT+ people in the UK that face this experience. Michaels (2015) attempted to estimate this figure but recognised that because of the lack of reliable data, the number of members of the community will always have to be speculated upon. This is supported by Ladd (2003) when he acknowledges that:

> it is commonly said that there appears to be a much larger percentage of Gay and Lesbian Deaf people than in the majority society, especially within Deaf families. However, there is almost no research into these subject and speculation would be unhelpful. (2003: 63)

It is possible that because the use of sign language is visual, a group of people signing at a Deaf LGBT+ event may be made up of both members of the LGBT+ community as well as their friends and allies, thereby appearing to be larger numbers of LGBT+ Deaf people than there actually is. Deaf LGBT+ people are often comfortable mixing and socialising with any member of the Deaf community (Chong, n.d.) because the shared experience of deafness becomes a priority rather than sexual orientation. Additionally, because the Deaf community is relatively small and intimate, people may be more comfortable and open about their sexual identities compared to other communities.

Third Culture Kids

As highlighted earlier, most Deaf LGBT+ people are raised in familial and social settings different from their own identity as Deaf people and LGBT+ people. To be able to understand how this might affect a Deaf LGBT+ person, we can view it from the perspective of the similar situation described as Third Culture Kids:

> A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated

> into each TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationships to others of similar background. (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001: 19)

It can be argued that Deaf children born to hearing parents will spend a significant part of their developmental years outside of their parents' culture. They are not hearing, and there are cultural differences between Deaf and hearing people. However, if Deaf children are exposed to members of the Deaf community, they may adopt some of both the hearing and Deaf cultural norms because of growing up in both cultures. However, as Pollock and Van Reken (2001) explain in the preceding extract, they may not have full ownership of both at this time. Some people may experience stronger links to one community than another, due to cultural immersion and language preferences.

Deaf young people as Third Culture Kids

When analysing the data collected from our research participants considering the young Deaf person as a Third Culture Kid, there are additional factors which should be considered. The first is the sign language the young person will acquire growing up. As Noah reflected, 'I use the language every day, I talk to my friends and family daily, so I am reminded that I am Deaf every day' (PM, UK, 2018). In some cases, like Liam shared, even if the parents are also Deaf, they will still not be able to share the same full cultural experiences as their children.

> My parents will never understand what I'm going through. Both [Deaf and LGBT+] communities are small and both understand what oppression means. They both like to have their own clubs where they can relax and be themselves. I like to go to those places because I know I can grow and flourish there, because the outside world won't give me the chance to do that on there. (BM, New Zealand, 2018)

Straddling the Deaf and hearing worlds can be challenging for Deaf people and there is an expectation that they will have to be the ones to have to adjust themselves on a daily basis, as Michael explains:

> I'm kind of in both the deaf world and the hearing world. My family are hearing and I've got lots of hearing friends. At work I talk and then I go into the deaf community and I have to really adjust myself. (GM, UK, 2015)

Like other TCKs, some of our research participants reported that when they felt they developed an early sense of belonging, it tended to be with other Deaf children and young people.

> I would look up to my friends because they were very confident, they were very assertive… the Deaf community is very small so you do have friends all around you as a Deaf person… if you meet a Deaf person for the first time you almost kind of become friends with them and that sticks for life… A few of my friends will tell me things and I'll learn from them. People share a lot in the Deaf community. (Alex, GM, UK, 2015)

The Deaf LGBT+ young person can be 'othered' in a similar way to a TCK because of their deafness and the sign language they may use as a first or preferred language and also because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This sense of otherness often increases later in life when exploring gender identity and sexual orientation. It is at this time when the Deaf LGBT+ community will become fundamental in their life.

Young Deaf LGBT+ cultural markers

Now that an overview of the Deaf LGBT+ community and how it can relate to feelings of otherness similar to TCKs has been shared, we would like to give a sense of what it is like to be young, Deaf and LGBT+ and this is achieved by sharing what the young people chose to tell us about their life experience. The research participants broached numerous topics, so what follows are the

themes identified including a sense of community, trust, support, education, Gay Sign Variation and contact with the community.

Sense of community

One of the major cultural markers of being Deaf and LGBT+ was the sense of com- munity one feels when sharing life experiences with other Deaf LGBT+ people. This was expressed by one young person when they said 'we have a strong Deaf community and then you throw in the LGBT+ aspect you get an even stronger community. The support is unbelievable' (Isabella, MTFP, UK, 2018). This was also expressed by Olivia who said that '[t]he first [positive] thing that comes to mind is the community, both the Deaf and the LGBT+ community. Especially within the LGBT+ community' (Olivia, LW, Sweden, 2018). There is a sense that there is something extraordinary when the two communities come together as was highlighted by Rob when he said 'I'm a member of a *super-super minority*. I'm part of two minorities who have their own cultures. I find that to be a very rich experience for myself' (Rob, GM, Belgium, 2018) (emphasis added).

Being a member of a number of communities and adopting multiple cultures can have a positive effect on people.

> I think as awareness of intersectionality is spreading it is also easier to be proud of multiple identities, so it's not that everyone's expected to identify as Deaf only at the deaf club anymore, but that there's an awareness that people are diverse and there are layers to peoples' identities. (Olivia, LW, Sweden, 2018)

This can often be forgotten by families who do not relate to being part of a specific minority status on a daily basis. One participant felt that '[t]he most positive thing of being a Deaf Youth LGBT is that the Deaf community as a minority accepts what my religious family wouldn't' (Lucas, GM, Sweden, 2018). The feeling of acceptance as a gay man in a Deaf LGBT+ community is

important to this person as they feel they are not accepted within their religious family. They are ‘different to the “norm” ’ (Oliver, GM, UK, 2018). The Deaf LGBT+ community sees past their religion.

It was also recognised by Aiden, a forward-thinking participant, that Deaf people and hearing people could and should work together to achieve things. His views centred around engaging the right people with the right experience to work together, whether they be hearing or Deaf, and encouraging the introduction of different perspectives, thereby fostering greater results.

> A lot of Deaf people think that hearing people control everything but I don’t think that’s always the case… We do need hearing people. They’ve got experience that we might not have in certain things. I think that’s the way forward. (GM, UK, 2015)

He felt that without the right individuals working on community projects, there was the potential that the desired aims and objectives of the community would be at risk of being accomplished. He understood that many members of the Deaf community felt they could trust individuals from the Deaf community more than hearing people, who were leading organisations that were established to serve the Deaf community.

Trust as a result of shared experience

Some of the sense of community that Deaf LGBT+ people feel comes from the shared experience of the minority status that the Deaf community and the LGBT+ community have. As one research participant explained, ‘I feel it’s easier to be understood as a Deaf person, probably due to my own experience of belonging to a minority group’ (Olivia, LW, Sweden, 2018). However, there are cases where although both communities share cultural behaviours, due to the lack of information and understanding of gender identities, some people consider themselves to be in a third minority group.

> I don't think my identities interlink and I don't know how I can make that happen. Perhaps if I met other Deaf trans and engaged in conversations and create a new community where there's a shared understanding. I don't have that at the moment. (Will, FTMP, Denmark, 2018)

Transgender Europe (TGEU), an organisation with a vision of people living 'according to their gender expression without interference and where trans people are respected and valued' (TGEU.org, 2019) produced a report titled *Oppression Squared: D/deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe* as a result of their 'Expert Meeting on D/deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences' held in Berlin in July 2017. They found that

> [t]he fact that both transphobia and ableism[2] are often ingrained within many of the numerous service providers that D/deaf and disabled trans people come into contact with, means they are likely to experience discrimination in relation to both aspects of their identities when simply trying to have their needs met. (Gale, 2017)

TGEU found that healthcare settings in particular, were inaccessible to D/deaf trans people because of peoples' attitudes, gatekeepers, poor access and lack of autonomy, choice and control, and that 'LGBTQI organisations have a key role to play in advocating on behalf of D/deaf and disabled trans people' (Gale, 2017). Will did not feel he had a network to connect with and TGEU found that 'D/deaf and disabled trans people as for everyone else… are currently missing out on valuable experiences within the trans community' because of a lack of 'engagement with LGBTIQ organisations' (Gale, 2017).

Trust within the community

Yet when there is a sense of shared experience, there often comes a sense of trust. However, it can take some time to build trust and welcome people into the community, and thereby protect oneself from betrayal or rejection. Aiden said that '[t]he Deaf community is quite small, so you're used to knowing people so

when a new person comes along you need to get to know that person a bit' (GM, UK, 2015).

Knowing that you can trust someone coming into the community is important:

> People share a lot in the Deaf community… Telling somebody something and them telling somebody else is not that good. You can't have many secrets in the Deaf community. I'll watch things on TV like *EastEnders* [British soap opera] and everyone knows everything about each other and it's a bit like that with the Deaf community. (Alex, GM, UK, 2015)

This validation of trust can come in the form of a 'reference' from a fellow Deaf gay community member to save 'time and effort of building friendship and trust with a person who would prove unaccepting' (Kane, 1994: 484). Perseverance and regular contact can be one way of building and maintaining trust. Once this trust is established, it fosters support from fellow members of the community which is an important part of being a member of the Deaf LGBT+ community.

> They've got confidence with each other. They can be themselves and they've all got something similar in common. Outside of that comfort zone, they could feel nervous and could feel that they wouldn't know how to cope, so when they're in that community they are very comfortable and very confident. So, I would say that there is a different culture because there is a commonality there. Deaf gay people in the Deaf gay community can be themselves, they can sign how they want, they can say what they want. They can be quite feminine or straight acting. It really doesn't matter. The way they behave, the way they dress, because they'll feel comfortable. (Alex, GM, UK, 2015)

However, even though there may be trust within the community, there is still a world outside of it that can be a daunting place for Deaf LGBT+ people. As one participant expressed, 'Despite being openly gay amongst my peers, I still get anxious about facing homophobia or to be judged on my sexuality every day.

This and being Deaf can cause some anxiety especially in public' (Oliver, GM, UK, 2018).

Support within the community for young Deaf LGBT+ people

The feelings of being understood as a Deaf person, a sense of belonging, creating new communities of shared understanding and trust can provide the members of the Deaf LGBT+ community with a significant amount of support as one research participant expressed.

> Great community and support network. Nowadays it's more 'acceptable' to be LGBT+ so we can be ourselves in public… We have a strong Deaf community and when you throw in the LGBT+ aspect – you get an even stronger community. The support is unbelievable. (Isabella, MTFP, UK, 2018)

However, the reality for many Deaf LGBT+ people is that there is a severe lack of support for them. There is the situation where the individual has to either access services for Deaf people or LGBT+ people but not necessarily targeted to Deaf LGBT+ people. This results in individuals being forced to choose between ser- vices for hearing people where there may not be adequate access to information in sign language or services that are run by either Deaf people or sign language users who provide support to Deaf people in various ways such as advocacy or interpreting. This can be problematic for a Deaf person because as the Deaf community is close-knit, this will mean they may not benefit from privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, this could also mean that they may have to 'out' themselves, depending on the reason and which services they need to access. Sadly, the third option is not to access services at all. The types of information the people who participated in this research expressed difficulty in access related to such areas as adoption, services for trans people, youth groups, services in new cities, sexual health information and social activities and entertainment, including social clubs and LGBT+ venues.

> I do not currently have access to support for all my identities as being young, Deaf and LGBT+. While I can kind of access support as a young person (youth groups, youth board, friends), and I can access support as a Deaf per- son (services, interpreters, Deaf community, Deaf events, friends etc.), I do not always have access as a LGBT+ person, in an accessible way or in a safe space in a Deaf setting. (Mia, BW/PW, New Zealand, 2018)

Because sign language is a first or preferred language, to be able to access main- stream services, there is the need to engage the services of a limited pool of sign language interpreters which, given how small and intimate the Deaf community is, alters the dynamics of the situation for the Deaf LGBT+ person and the professionals involved. This puts the young Deaf LDBT+ community at a disadvantage by disempowering their independence.

> When I was younger, it was so difficult to access services because I lived in a small city – which means if I tried to get an interpreter – the chances of me getting an interpreter who I knew would be highly likely. I didn't want to be outed, so I would look for support online. I would go into chat-rooms and ask for support from people all over the world. As lovely as they were, I didn't feel like I got much support from them as I could have if I was able to access services face-to-face. I feel I needed support in person, not online. (Liam, BM, New Zealand, 2018)

However, there are some positive efforts being made to make events and services accessible for Deaf LGBT+ people.

> A year ago, there was a Baltic Pride, and they released the programme for the day. I got into touch with them to ask if they could provide interpreters. They said they would be happy to but not for the whole programme, which I understood as it would be the first time they've done it. But I hope in the

> future, we can work with them and give them information on how to provide accessibility to Deaf people. (Amelia, QW, Estonia, 2018)

For Deaf people, having real access to mainstream events ensures full participation and inclusion in society, without them being made to feel like second- class citizens. It is therefore disappointing to hear that even when there is a dedicated service for Deaf individuals, the amount of time it takes to access this can be disproportionate, compared to hearing people's access. Logan expressed that 'I don't really access support. I am currently in the process of getting BSL counselling, but this is taking its time… almost a year since application' (GM, UK, 2018).

The difficulty in accession services creates an environment where people are reluctant to engage and Mason described life as being '10 times harder' (GM, UK, 2018) for Deaf people compared to the majority hearing population. Young Deaf LGBT+ people constantly have to find alternative methods of accessing services including online or via a text relay service. However, Oliver said they 'would rather not use a text relay service when it becomes a personal and/or sensitive issue' (GM, UK, 2018) and without early intervention, this can seriously affect a persons' physical and mental health.

Support within education settings for the young Deaf LGBT+ community

One major area that the young Deaf LGBT+ people talked about was the lack of support in education regarding their LGBT+ identity.

> I strongly feel that LGBT+ education in schools is of paramount importance. This is to show Deaf kids that sexuality and gender are two separate topics. Raising awareness is vital in reducing bullying, stigma etc. I strongly encourage that LGBT+ education should be introduced in schools to give every child the feeling of love and acceptance of whatever and whoever they are. (Sophia, MTFP, UK, 2018)

It was felt that individuals would have explored and had a better understanding of their identity earlier on if they were given support. Many people expressed a feeling of having had wasted lives by not being educated to the options available to them and having had the knowledge, they would have felt more confident to be themselves, felt less confused, be more open and honest and more willing to ask the questions they felt they wanted to. Having the discussions and education in school would have provided a space that may not have been available elsewhere, in the home, for example. Mia said that '[b]ecause I grew up in a Christian family, where LGBT+ was looked down upon, LGBT+ education at school would have given me a separate environment or opportunity to feel more OK about myself' (BW/PW, New Zealand, 2018).

These discussions in school would have also encouraged everyone to consider themselves as individuals and recognise this among their peers resulting in respecting normalising the differences. Talking openly about difference would have gone some way to reduce any discrimination and negativity faced by the young Deaf LGBT+ people or those questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation and change negative attitudes into positive ones, thereby resulting in 'less homophobia in society' (Isabella, MTFP, UK, 2018). It was felt that these discussions among peers were important but that they should also be led by the teaching staff who have a degree of power and influence over the thought processes of the young people they encounter on a daily basis.

> I remember one time at school, a teacher said they suspected a child may be gay, but it was said in an accusing way. Why have that attitude? Instead of accusing, why not be supportive? Be encouraging. I feel that kind of support was missing. If I flirted with girls, the teacher would smile and tut, but if I flirted with boys, the teacher would find it repulsive and tried to separate us. (Liam, BM, New Zealand, 2018)

In addition, talking openly would protect people from the risks of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infection. Jacob said he would 'want the best

safety for pupils/students. Sex education that includes LGBT+ is extremely important and teaches people how to protect themselves' (GM, Ireland, 2018).

As the Deaf LGBT+ community becomes more visible to both the Deaf community and the LGBT+ community, there develops more awareness of the minority within a minority from both perspectives and this creates an enhanced level of acceptance from both the Deaf and hearing communities. Aiden explained this from the Deaf community perspective.

> The Deaf community have changed attitudes, I think. Before they would reject gay people… Slowly but surely, the wider Deaf community has seen a change in attitude and they're more accepting of Deaf gay people so that's an achievement, I suppose but that's just something that's happened. That's just developed over time. That's the same in the hearing world. (GM, UK, 2015)

Others also felt that society, in general, was now more accepting of diversity and they felt fortunate to live in such an environment. The increased acceptance of Deaf and LGBT+ people creates a sense that advances in personal and professional lives are increasingly possible. The recognition of cultural markers identified within the sub-group of the Deaf LGBT+ community was also welcomed.

Gay Sign Variation within the Deaf LGBT+ community

One of the most recognised and distinctive cultural practice within the Deaf gay community is the use of Gay Sign Variation (GSV) (Kleinfeld and Warner, 1996; Leeson, 2005). This not only includes a specific lexicon but also a style of signing which is particularly prevalent with Deaf gay men when used in humorous situations and with drag. GSV echoes Polari, which is, 'put simply, a secret language mainly used by gay men and lesbians, in London and other UK cities with an established gay subculture, in the first 70 or so years of the twentieth century' (Baker, 2002).

Baker explains that Polari was used to construct gay identities, and as Michael explained, ‘through friends you pick it up really and you get an under- standing of it because it’s quite different to British Sign Language but people use it for humour really’ (GM, UK, 2015). GSV has never been officially documented by linguists and is passed on by generally older members of the community who know it and used it when wanting to converse with other gay people without being outed. One research participant shared how he was exposed to GSV and Alex said, ‘I was taught GSV and every now and again it would come up. You could use some covert signing which you may use if you were in a group of Deaf people… just in case people are watching’ (GM, UK, 2015).

Like Polari, over time and certainly more recently, the use of GSV among young people within the Deaf gay community has reduced somewhat because of the shift in society’s acceptance of the LGBT+ community.

> I never use it. You don’t see it much now. It tends to be the older Deaf gay people who will use GSV. I can’t do it myself. I could recognise a few things but most of the hearing community wouldn’t understand it. They wouldn’t know its usage for example, if they saw it. I say I don’t see it much because I’m not looking for it. (Aiden, GM, UK, 2015)

Although GSV is one common feature that can be shared to keep the community connected, something of substance is needed to keep it together in the long term. One motivating reason to stick together is for the purpose of protecting them- selves from instances of homophobia as well as disability discrimination, and this can be achieved by regular contact and meeting up.

The importance of keeping in touch within the Deaf LGBT+ community

Another cultural marker of the Deaf community, in general, is the tendency to meet up with friends and to support Deaf events regionally, nationally and inter- nationally. This stems from the times when Deaf children were largely educated in boarding schools away from their family, creating strong familial bonds which

would last decades. Upon leaving school, they would be connected to a network of friends based throughout the country. Alex described this as

> being together, going to events and planning events all around the UK and maybe Deaf people like to get together with each other. They do arrange events, they do meet up and they do get together with friends. And of course, the Deaf community is very small so you do have friends all around you as a Deaf person and Deaf people travel a lot because when they leave school they keep in touch. The community feels quite strong. I mean, from London you could travel to Scotland quite easily and keep in touch with friends. I think it's different for hearing people. They wouldn't necessarily travel to see people but if you meet a Deaf person for the first time you almost kind of become friends with them and that sticks for life. Of course, the signing is different between north and south and international sign is different so you do have to adjust but it makes the language stronger, I think. (GM, UK, 2015)

This traditionally occurred more frequently in the past because there were many more boarding schools, most of which have now been closed, resulting in Deaf children being educated in units within mainstream schools. In addition, there were not technological advances available as there are today, which allow for greater flexibility to connect through the internet and social media. Ethan recognises this when he says,

> [w]hile Deaf people always used to meet at Deaf clubs, this is now not always the case due to Facebook, mobiles etc. It's easy for people to meet in pubs or clubs, when younger [people] had to meet at the Deaf club due to being unable to contact others. (GM, UK, 2015)

Aiden recognised that although technology can enhance community spirit, this larger community feel may be affected because of such technologies:

> Deaf people have their own culture. Things like Deaf clubs. That's part of the culture. There's a lot of evidence of that. Maybe it's less now than before because the community, I feel, is a bit weaker now. I think there is less com- munity feeling. There are less Deaf events happening, I feel. That will affect culture. Cohesion between different groups. When there is one group, you get cohesion but when there are smaller groups, that reduces. You have your own groups of friends don't you. In general, it's a big community. (GM, UK, 2015)

Additionally, due to mainstreaming, several Deaf youths are being brought up without their peers or role models. Therefore, within the Deaf LGBT+ community, the explosion of the internet has meant that Deaf LGBT+ people are more connected to like-minded individuals throughout the UK and the world, where local and international groups are established. Michael described an annual meet- up in Gran Canaria positively when he said:

> It's great. A good laugh. You meet loads of different people and you kind of get to know their backgrounds and their cultures from their countries and you get a really good understanding and you can share information and experiences. (GM, UK, 2015)

Conclusion

This chapter has, for the first time, focused specifically on young members of the Deaf LGBT+ community by examining their views and experiences relating to their identity and culture. This was achieved by collecting the views of 21 young members of the Deaf LGBT+ community who chose to partake in research to go some way to fill the gap in knowledge relating to this group within the Deaf and LGBT+ communities. We began by giving some indication of the range of people who provided their views, which is broad and all-encompassing. We gave some background context to the Deaf community, which views itself as sharing a language and culture different to the majority of the society in which

they live. We explained how Deaf children often grow up in familial settings which are different to them, where friends and family often do not fully understand the situation they are faced with regarding the almost separate worlds they inhabit, which we appreciate can be a lonely and isolating place to be. We drew parallels with this to the experience young LGBT+ people face when coming to terms with and exploring their gender identity or sexual orientation.

It is only when Deaf LGBT+ people meet other members of the community that they really begin to understand the strong sense of shared experience and begin to feel part of a supportive minority within a minority. It has been important to begin to research the experiences of young Deaf LGBT+ people, and it is hoped further research will develop our understanding of this rich and diverse community.

It is clear that from the responses we received from our participants that whilst society has developed its understanding and attitude towards diversity in recent decades in terms of awareness and activism, there is still a considerable amount of work that needs to be done before Deaf LGBT+ people will feel fully included in society. Lack of intra-cultural awareness seems to be the common factor. The medical profession needs to make sure that parents are provided with all necessary information about raising a Deaf child – the linguistic and cultural aspects of their upbringing – before making decisions that could be seen as invasive and permanent, both physically and emotionally.

LGBT+ services need to reflect on whether their services are fully accessible to all their audiences and take steps in ensuring that they are, by consulting with members of the Deaf community to make sure they are included. The government needs to implement good quality inclusive sexual and relationship education (SRE) in schools. Identity development comes from the experiences young people have and plays a big part in defining who they are as adults. Having inclusive SRE would take them one step further in the process.

The Deaf community should take steps to be more proactive in ensuring that diversity is reflected amongst members of the community, by educating each other and providing a level of exposure using various methods such as media, literature and resources, that the hearing community would not direct and lead on. Additionally, the Deaf community could be more aware of intersectionality and learn how it can be better harnessed for more power and agency.

Notes

1. Some researchers use the lowercase 'deaf' when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the capitalised 'Deaf' when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language and a culture. We use 'Deaf' throughout. For more information, please refer to the works of Lucas, 1995; Padden and Humphries, 2009; Woodward, 1989.
2. Ableism describes the discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities. For more information see G. Wolbring. 2008. The politics of ableism. *Devel- opment*, 51(2), 252–258 [Online]. Available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057%2Fdev.2008.17.pdf [accessed 13 June 2019].

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